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THE HAPPY LIFE

BY

CHARLES W. ELIOT

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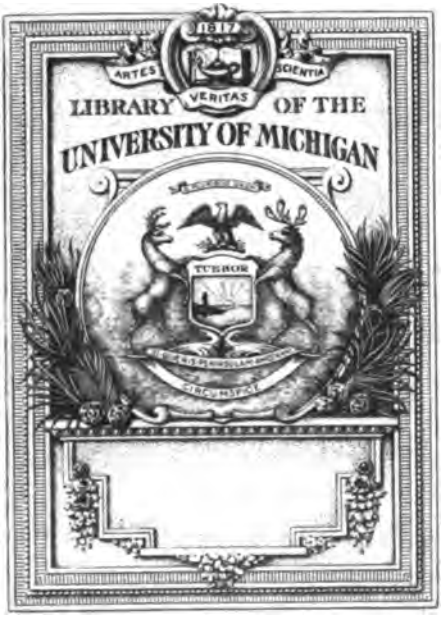
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THE HAPPY LIFE

BY

CHARLES·W·ELIOT

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The Happy Life

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The Happy Life

By Charles W. Eliot, LL.D.
President of Harvard University



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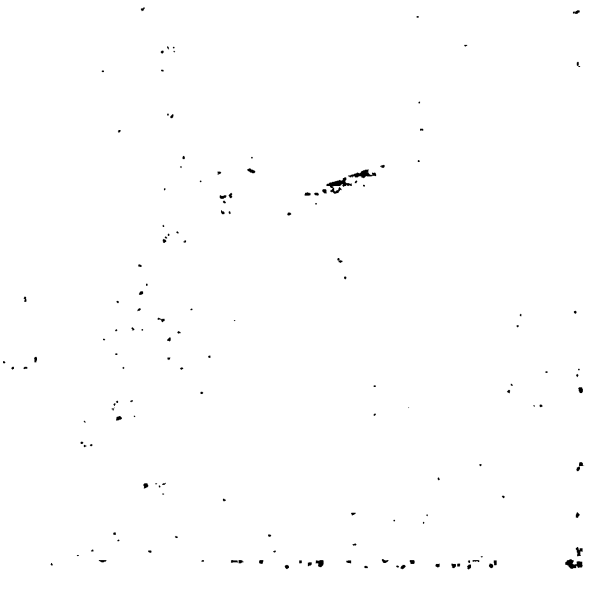
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The Happy Life

By Charles W. Eliot, LL.D.
President of Harvard University



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The Happy Life

I

The Moral Purpose of the Universe

MY subject is "The Happy Life." I address here especially young people who have passed the period of childhood, with its unreflecting gayety, fleeting shadows, gusty griefs, and brief despairs, and have entered, under conditions of singular privilege, upon rational and responsible living. For you happiness must be conscious, considerate, and consistent with habits of observing, reading and reflecting. Now reflecting has always been a grave business,

"Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;"

and it must be confessed that our times present some new obstacles to a life of thoughtful happiness. Until this century the masses of mankind were almost dumb; but now their moans and complaints have become audible through telephone, telegraph and rotary press.

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The Happy Life

The millions are now saying what the moody poets have always said:

"The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies,
All that we wish to stay
Tempts, and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright."

The gloomy moralist is still repeating: "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

The manual laborers of to-day, who are much better off than the same classes of laborers have been in any earlier times, are saying just what Shelley said to the men of England in 1819:

"The seed ye sow another reaps,
The wealth ye find another keeps,
The robes ye weave another wears,
The arms ye forge another bears."

They would adopt without change the words in which that eminent moralist, Robinson Crusoe, a century earlier, described the condition of the laboring classes: "The men of labor spent their strength in daily struggling for bread to maintain the vital strength they labored with; so liv-

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ing in a daily circulation of sorrow, living but to work, and working but to live, as if daily bread were the only end of wearisome life, and a wearisome life the only occasion of daily bread."

Matthew Arnold calls his love to come to the window and listen to the "melancholy, long-withdrawing roar" of the sea upon the moonlit beach at Dover; and these are his dismal words to her:

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

The poets are by no means the only offenders; the novelists and scientists take their turn. The fiction of this century deals much with the lives of the wretched, dissolute, and vicious, and with the most unjust and disastrous conditions of modern society. A fresh difficulty in the way of natural happiness is the highly speculative opinion, lately put forward by men of science

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and promptly popularized, to the effect that external nature offsets every good with an evil, and that the visible universe is unmoral, or indifferent as regards right and wrong, revealing no high purpose or intelligent trend. This is, indeed, a melancholy notion; but that it should find acceptance at this day, and really make people miserable, only illustrates the curious liability of the human intelligence to sudden collapse. The great solid conviction which science, within the past three centuries, has enabled thinking men and women to settle down on is that all discovered and systematized knowledge is as nothing compared with the undiscovered, and that a boundless universe of unimagined facts and forces interpenetrates and encompasses what seems the universe to us. In spite of this impregnable conviction people distress themselves because, forsooth, they cannot discern the moral purpose or complete spiritual intent of this dimly seen, fractional universe which is all we know. Why should they discern it?

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II

Lower and Higher Pleasures

IT is, then, in spite of many old and some new discouragements that we are all seeking the happy life. We know that education spreads, knowledge grows, and public liberty develops; but can we be sure that public and private happiness increase? What the means and sources of happiness are in this actual world, with our present surroundings and with no reference to joys or sorrows in any other world, is a natural, timely, and wholesome inquiry. We may be sure that one principle will hold throughout the whole pursuit of thoughtful happiness, — the principle that the best way to secure future happiness is to be as happy as is rightfully possible to-day. To secure any desirable capacity for the future, near or remote, cultivate it to-day. What would be the use of immortality for a person who cannot use well half an hour? asks Emerson.

In trying to enumerate the positive satisfactions which an average man may reasonably

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expect to enjoy in this world, I of course take no account of those too common objects of human pursuit,—wealth, power, and fame; first, because they do not as a rule contribute to happiness; and secondly, because they are unattainable by mankind in general. I invite you to consider only those means of happiness which the humble and obscure millions may possess. The rich and famous are too few to affect appreciably the sum of human happiness. I begin with satisfactions of sense.

Sensuous pleasures, like eating and drinking, are sometimes described as animal, and therefore unworthy. It must be confessed, however, that men are, in this life, animals all through, —whatever else they may be,—and that they have a right to enjoy without reproach those pleasures of animal existence which maintain health, strength, and life itself. Familiar ascetic and pessimistic dogmas to the contrary notwithstanding, these pleasures, taken naturally and in moderation, are all pure, honorable, and wholesome. Moreover, all attempts to draw a line between bodily satisfactions on the one hand, and mental or spiritual satisfactions on the other, and to distinguish the first as beastly indulgences, and the second as the only pleasures worthy of a rational being, have failed,

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and must fail; for it is manifestly impossible to draw a sharp line of division between pleasures, and to say that these are bodily, and those intellectual or moral. Are the pleasures of sight and hearing bodily or mental? Is delight in harmony or in color a pleasure of the sense, or of the imagination? What sort of a joy is a thing of beauty? Is it an animal or a spiritual joy? Is the delight of a mother in fondling her smiling baby a physical or a moral delight? But though we cannot divide pleasures into animal and moral, unworthy and worthy, we can, nevertheless, divide them into lower and higher pleasures: the lower, those which, like eating and drinking, prompt to the maintenance and reproduction of life, and which can be impaired or destroyed by prolongation or repetition; the higher, those which, like the pleasures of the eye or ear, seem to be ends in themselves. In the lower there can be destructive excess, in the higher excess is impossible.

Recognizing, then, that there are higher pleasures than eating and drinking, let us clearly perceive that three meals a day all one's life not only give in themselves a constantly renewed innocent satisfaction, but provide the necessary foundation for all other satisfactions. Taking food and drink is a great enjoyment for

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healthy people, and those who do not enjoy eating seldom have much capacity for enjoyment or usefulness of any sort. Under ordinary circumstances it is by no means a purely bodily pleasure. We do not eat alone, but in families, or sets of friends and comrades; and the table is the best centre of friendships and of the domestic affections. When, therefore, a workingman says that he has worked all his life to procure a subsistence for himself and his family, he states that he has secured some fundamental satisfactions, namely, food, productive employment, and family life. The satisfaction of eating is so completely a matter of appetite that such distinction as there is between the luxurious and the hardy in regard to this enjoyment is altogether in favor of the hardy. Who does not remember some rough and perhaps scanty meal in camp, or on the march, or at sea, or in the woods, which was infinitely more delicious than the most luxurious dinner during indoor or sedentary life? But that appetite depends on health. Take good care, then, of your teeth and your stomachs, and be ashamed not of enjoying your food, but of not enjoying it. There was a deal of sound human nature in the unexpected reply of the dying old woman to her minister's leading question: "Here at the end of a

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long life, which of the Lord's mercies are you most thankful for?" Her eye brightened as she answered: "My victuals."

Let us count next pleasures through the eye. Unlike the other senses, the eye is always at work except when we sleep, and may, consequently, be the vehicle of far more enjoyment than any other organ of sense. It has given our race its ideas of infinity, symmetry, grace, and splendor; it is a chief source of childhood's joys, and throughout life the guide to almost all pleasurable activities. The pleasure it gives us, however, depends largely upon the amount of attention we pay to the pictures which it incessantly sets before the brain. Two men walk along the same road: one notices the blue depths of the sky, the floating clouds, the opening leaves upon the trees, the green grass, the yellow buttercups, and the far stretch of the open fields; the other has precisely the same pictures on his retina, but pays no attention to them. One sees, and the other does not see; one enjoys an unspeakable pleasure, and the other loses that pleasure which is as free to him as the air. The beauties which the eye reveals are infinitely various in quality and scale; one mind prefers the minute, another the vast; one the delicate and tender, another the coarse and

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rough; one the inanimate things, another the animate creation. The whole outward world is the kingdom of the observant eye. He who enters into any part of that kingdom to possess it has a store of pure enjoyment in life which is literally inexhaustible and immeasurable. His eyes alone will give him a life worth living.

Next comes the ear as a minister of enjoyment, but next at a great interval. The average man probably does not recognize that he gets much pleasure through hearing. He thinks that his ears are to him chiefly a convenient means of human intercourse. But let him experience a temporary deafness, and he will learn that many a keen delight came to him through the ear. He will miss the beloved voice, the merry laugh, the hum of the city, the distant chime, the song of birds, the running brook, the breeze in the trees, the lapping wavelets, and the thundering beach; and he will learn that familiar sounds have been to him sources of pure delight—an important element in his well-being. Old Isaak Walton found in the lovely sounds of earth a hint of Heaven:

"How joyed my heart in the rich melodies
That overhead and round me did arise!
The moving leaves—the water's gentle flow—

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Delicious music hung on every bough.
Then said I in my heart, If that the Lord
Such lovely music on the earth accord;
If to weak, sinful man such sounds are given,
Oh! what must be the melody of heaven!"

A high degree of that fine pleasure which music gives is not within the reach of all; yet there are few to whom the pleasure is wholly denied. To take part in producing harmony, as in part-singing, gives the singers an intense pleasure, which is doubtless partly physical and partly mental. I am told that to play good music at sight, as one of several performers playing different instruments, is as keen a sensuous and intellectual enjoyment as the world affords.

These pleasures through the eye and ear are open in civilized society to all who have the will to seek them, and the intelligence to cultivate the faculties through which they are enjoyed. They are quite as likely to bless him who works with hand or brain all day for a living, as him who lives inactive on his own savings or on those of other people. The outward world yields them spontaneously to every healthy body and alert mind; but the active mind is as essential to the winning of them as the sound body.

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The Happy Life

There is one great field of knowledge, too much neglected in our schools and colleges, which offers to the student endless pleasures and occupations through the trained and quickened senses of sight, hearing, and touch. I mean the wide field called natural history, which comprehends geography, meteorology, botany, zoology, mineralogy, and geology. Charles Darwin, the greatest naturalist of the past century, said that with natural history and the domestic affections a man might be truly happy. Not long ago I was urging a young naturalist of twenty-six to spend the next summer in Europe. He thought it was hardly right for him to allow himself that indulgence; and when I urged that the journey would be very enjoyable as well as profitable, he replied: "Yes; but you know I can be happy anywhere in the months when things are growing." He meant that the pleasures of observation were enough for him when he could be out of doors. That young man was poor, delicate in health, and of a retiring and diffident disposition; yet life was full of keenest interest to him.

Our century is distinguished by an ardent return of civilized man to that love of nature from which books and urban life had temporarily diverted him. The poetry and the science of our

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times alike foster this love, and add to the delights which come to lovers of nature through the keen senses, the delights of the soaring imagination and the far-reaching reason. In many of our mental moods the contemplation of Nature brings peace and joy. Her patient ways shame hasty little man; her vastnesses calm and elevate his troubled mind; her terrors fill him with awe; her inexplicable and infinite beauties with delight. Her equal care for the least things and the greatest corrects his scale of values. He cannot but believe that the vast material frame of things is informed and directed by an infinite Intelligence and Will, just as his little animal body is informed by his own conscious mind and will.

It is apparent from what I have said of pleasures through the eye and ear, and from contact with nature, that a good measure of out-of-door life is desirable for him who would secure the elements of a happy life. The urban tendency of our population militates against free access to out-of-door delights. The farmer works all day in the fields, and his children wander at will in the open air; the sailor can see at any moment the whole hemisphere of the heavens and the broad plain of the sea; but the city resident may not see a tree or a shrub for weeks together,

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and can barely discern a narrow strip of sky, as he walks at the bottom of the deep ditches we call streets. The wise man whose work is in the city, and indoors at that, will take every possible opportunity to escape into the fresh air and the open country. Certain good tendencies in this respect have appeared within recent years. Hundreds of thousands of people who must work daily in compact cities now live in open suburbs; cities provide parks and decorated avenues of approach to parks; out-of-door sports and exercises become popular; safe country boarding-schools for city children are multiplied, and public holidays and half-holidays increase in number. These are appreciable compensations for the disadvantages of city life. The urban population which really utilizes these facilities may win a keener enjoyment from nature than the rural population, to whom natural beauty is at every moment accessible. The cultivation of mind and the increased sensibility which city life develops heighten the delight in natural beauty. Moreover, though man destroys much natural loveliness in occupying any territory for purposes of residence or business, he also creates much loveliness of grassy fields and banks, mirroring waters, perfectly developed trees, graceful

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shrubs and brilliant flowers. In these days no intelligent city population need lack the means and opportunities of frequent out-of-door enjoyment. Our climate is indeed rough and changeable, but, on the whole, produces scenes of much more various beauty than any monotonous climate, while against the occasional severity of our weather artificial protection is more and more provided. What we may wisely ask of our tailors and our landscape architects is protection in the open air from the extremes of heat, cold, and wind. The provision of an equable climate indoors is by no means sufficient to secure either the health or the happiness of the people.

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Family Love

FROM the love of nature we turn to family love. The domestic affections are the principal source of human happiness and well-being. The mutual loves of husband and wife, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, are not only the chief sources of happiness, but the chief springs of action, and the chief safeguards from evil. The young man and the young woman work and save in order that they may be married and have a home of their own; once married, they work and save that they may bring up well a family. The supreme object of the struggling and striving of most men is the family. One might almost say that the security and elevation of the family and of family life are the prime objects of civilization, and the ultimate ends of all industry and trade. In respect to this principal source of happiness, the young mechanic, operative, clerk, or laborer is generally better off than the young professional man, inasmuch as he can marry earlier. He goes from the parental roof to his

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own roof with only a short interval, if any, between. The workingman is often a grandfather before he is fifty years old; the professional man but seldom. Love before marriage, being the most attractive theme of poetry and fiction, gets a very disproportionate amount of attention in literature, as compared with the domestic affections after marriage.

Concerning these normal domestic joys, any discerning person who has experienced them, and has been intimate with four or five generations, will be likely to make three observations: In the first place, the realization of the natural and legitimate enjoyments in domestic life depends on the possession of physical and moral health. Whatever impairs bodily vigor, animal spirits, and good temper lessens the chance of attaining to the natural domestic joys,—joys which by themselves, without any additions whatever except food and steady work, make earthly life worth living. In the second place, they endure, and increase with lapse of years; the satisfactions of normal married life do not decline, but mount. Children are more and more interesting as they grow older; at all stages, from babyhood to manhood and womanhood, they are to be daily enjoyed. People who think they shall enjoy their children to-morrow, or year

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after next, will never enjoy them. The greatest pleasure in them comes late; for, as Hamerton mentions in his "Human Intercourse," the most exquisite satisfaction of the parent is to come to respect and admire the powers and character of the child. Thirdly, the family affections and joys are the ultimate source of civilized man's idea of a loving God, — an idea which is a deep root of happiness when it becomes an abiding conviction. They have supplied all the conceptions of which this idea is the supreme essence, or infinite product. It deserves mention here that these supreme enjoyments of the normal, natural life — the domestic joys — are woman's more than man's; because his function of bread-winning necessarily separates him from his home during a good part of his time, particularly since domestic or house industries have been superseded by factory methods.

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Pleasure in Bodily Exertion

I TURN now to the satisfaction which comes from physical exertion, including brainwork. Everybody knows some form of activity which gives him satisfaction. Perhaps it is riding a horse, or rowing a boat, or tramping all day through woods or along beaches with a gun on the shoulder, or climbing a mountain, or massing into a ball or bloom a paste of sticky iron in a puddling furnace (that heaviest of labor), or wrestling with the handles of the plunging, staggering plow, or tugging at a boat's tiller when the breeze is fresh, or getting in hay before the shower. There is real pleasure and exhilaration in bodily exertion, particularly with companionship (of men or animals) and competition. There is pleasure in the exertion even when it is pushed to the point of fatigue, as many a sportsman knows; and this pleasure is in good measure independent of the attainment of any practical end. There is pleasure in mere struggle, so it be not hopeless, and

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in overcoming resistance, obstacles, and hardships. When to the pleasure of exertion is added the satisfaction of producing a new value, and the further satisfaction of earning a livelihood through that new value, we have the common pleasurable conditions of productive labor. Every workingman who is worth his salt (I care not whether he works with his hands and brains, or with his brains alone) takes satisfaction, first, in the working, secondly, in the product of his work, and thirdly, in what that product yields to him. The carpenter who takes no pleasure in the mantel he has made, the farm laborer who does not care for the crops he has cultivated, the weaver who takes no pride in the cloth he has woven, the engineer who takes no interest in the working of the engine he directs, is a monstrosity. It is an objection to many forms of intellectual labor that their immediate product is intangible and often imperceptible. The fruit of mental labor is often diffused, remote, or subtile. It eludes measurement, and even observation. On the other hand, mental labor is more enjoyable than manual labor in the process. The essence of the joy lies in the doing, rather than in the result of the doing. There is a lifelong and solid satisfaction in any productive labor, manual or mental, which is not pushed

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beyond the limit of strength. The difference between the various occupations of men in respect to yielding this satisfaction is much less than people suppose; for occupations become habitual in time, and the daily work in every calling gets to be so familiar that it may fairly be called monotonous. My occupation, for instance, offers, I believe, more variety than that of most professional men; yet I should say that nine-tenths of my work, from day to day, was routine work, presenting no more novelty or fresh interest to me than the work of a carpenter or blacksmith, who is always making new things on old types, presents to him. The Oriental, hot-climate figment that labor is a curse is contradicted by the experience of all the progressive nations. The Teutonic stock owes everything that is great and inspiring in its destiny to its faculty of overcoming difficulties by hard work, and of taking heartfelt satisfaction in this victorious work. It is not the dawdlers and triflers who find life worth living; it is the steady, strenuous, robust workers.

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V

The Pleasure of Reading

ONCE when I was talking with Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes about the best pleasures in life, he mentioned, as one of the most precious, frequent contact with quick and well-stored minds in large variety; he valued highly the number, frequency, and variety of quickening intellectual encounters. We were thinking of contact in conversation; but this pleasure, if only to be procured by personal meetings, would obviously be within the reach, as a rule, of only a very limited number of persons. Fortunately for us and for posterity, the cheap printing-press has put within easy reach of every man who can read all the best minds both of the past and the present. For one-tenth part of a year's wages a young mechanic can buy, before he marries, a library of famous books which, if he masters it, will make him a well-read man. For half-a-day's wages a clerk can provide himself with a weekly paper which will keep him informed for a year of all important current events. Public libraries,

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circulating libraries, Sunday-school libraries, and book-clubs nowadays bring much reading to the door of every household and every solitary creature that wants to read. This is a new privilege for the mass of mankind; and it is an inexhaustible source of intellectual and spiritual nutriment. It seems as if this new privilege alone must alter the whole aspect of society in a few generations. Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counsellors, and the most patient of teachers. With his daily work and his books, many a man whom the world thought forlorn has found life worth living. It is a mistake to suppose that a great deal of leisure is necessary for this happy intercourse with books. Ten minutes a day devoted affectionately to good books — indeed to one book of the first order like the English Bible or Shakespeare, or to two or three books of the second order like Homer, Virgil, Milton, or Bacon — will in thirty years make all the difference between a cultivated and an uncultivated man, between a man mentally rich and a man mentally poor. The pleasures of reading are, of course, in good part pleasures of the imagination; but they are just as natural and actual as pleasures of the sense, and are often more accessible and more lasting.

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Mutual Service and Cooperation

IN the next place I ask your attention to the fact that man is a part of outward nature, and that the men and women among whom our lot is cast are an important part of our actual environment. In some relation or other to these human beings we perforce must stand. The question in what relation we had better stand to them is a practical, this-world question, and not a sentimental or next-world question. Further, our sympathetic feelings, over which we have hardly more control than we have over the beating of our hearts, go out to our fellow-men more and more widely, as better means of communication bring home to us the joys and sorrows of widespread multitudes. In what relation is it for our satisfaction to stand in this world toward our fellow-men? Shall we love or hate them, bless or curse them, help or hinder them? These are not theoretical questions which arise out of religious speculation or some abstract philosophy. They are earthly, every-

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day, concrete questions, as intensely practical as the question how are we to get our daily bread, or where are we to find shelter from the snowstorm. Human beings are all about us; we and they are mutually dependent in ways so complex and intricate that no wisdom can unravel them. It is in vain for us or them to say, Let us alone; for that is a downright impossibility. To the question, How do reasonable men under these circumstances naturally and inevitably incline to act toward their fellow-beings? there is but one common-sense, matter-of-fact answer, namely, they incline to serve and cooperate with them. That civilized society exists at all is a demonstration that this inclination in the main governs human relations. Every great city is dependent for food, drink, and fuel on a few bridges, dams, canals, or aqueducts which a dozen intelligent human devils, armed with suitable explosives and fire-bombs, could destroy in a night. If the doctrine of total depravity were anything but the invention of a morbid human imagination, the massing of people by hundreds of thousands would be too dangerous to be attempted. Civilized society assumes that the great majority of men will combine to procure advantages, resist evils, defend rights, and remedy wrongs. Following this general and in-

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evitable inclination, the individual finds that by serving others he best serves himself; because he thus conforms to the promptings of his own and their best nature. The most satisfactory thing in all this earthly life is to be able to serve our fellow-beings, — first those who are bound to us by ties of love, then the wider circle of fellow-townsmen, fellow-countrymen, or fellow-men. To be of service is a solid foundation for contentment in this world. For our present purpose it does not matter where we got these ideas about our own better nature and its best satisfaction; it is enough that our generation, as a matter of fact, has these ideas, and is ruled by them.

The amount of the service is no measure of the satisfaction or happiness which he who renders the service derives from it. One man founds an academy or a hospital; another sends one boy to be educated at the academy, or one sick man to be treated at the hospital. The second is the smaller service, but may yield the greater satisfaction. Sir Samuel Romilly attacked the monstrous English laws which affixed the death penalty to a large number of petty offences against property, like poaching, sheep-stealing and pocket-picking. In the dawn of a February morning, when the wind was

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blowing a gale and the thermometer was below zero, Captain Smith, of the Cuttyhunk Light-house, took three men off a wreck which the heavy sea was fast pounding to pieces on a reef close below the light. Sir Samuel Romilly's labors ultimately did an amount of good quite beyond computation; but he lived to see accomplished only a small part of the beneficent changes he had advocated. The chances are that Captain Smith got more satisfaction for the rest of his life out of that rescue, done in an hour, than Sir Samuel out of his years of labor for a much-needed reform in the English penal code. There was another person who took satisfaction in that rescue ever after, and was entitled to. When day dawned on that wintry morning, Captain Smith's wife, who had been listening restlessly to the roar of the sea and the wind, could lie still no longer. She got up and looked out of the window. To her horror there was a small schooner on the reef in plain sight, one mast fallen over the side, and three men lashed to the other mast. Her husband was still fast asleep. Must she rouse him? If she did, she knew he would go out there into that furious sea and freezing wind. If she waited only a little while, the men would be dead, and it would be of no use to go. Should she speak

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to him? She did. Oh, it is not the amount of good done which measures the love or heroism which prompted the serviceable deed, or the happiness which the doer gets from it! It is the spirit of service which creates both the merit and the satisfaction.

One of the purest and most enduring of human pleasures is to be found in the possession of a good name among one's neighbors and acquaintances. As Shakespeare puts it:

"The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation."

This is not fame, or even distinction; it is local reputation among the few scores or hundreds of persons who really know one. It is a satisfaction quite of this world, and one attained by large numbers of quiet men and women whose names are never mentioned beyond the limits of their respective sets of acquaintance. Such reputation regards, not mental power or manual skill, but character; it is slowly built upon purity, integrity, courage, and sincerity. To possess it is a crowning satisfaction which is oftenest experienced to the full rather late in life, when some other pleasures begin to fade away.

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vii

The Selection of Beliefs

LASTLY, I shall venture to call your attention to the importance — with a view to a happy life — of making a judicious selection of beliefs. Here we are living on a little islet of sense and fact in the midst of a boundless ocean of the unknown and mysterious. From year to year and century to century the islet expands, as new districts are successively lifted from out the encompassing sea of ignorance; but it still remains encircled by this prodigious sea. In this state of things every inquisitive, truth-seeking human being is solicited by innumerable beliefs, old and new. The past generations, out of which we spring, have been believing many undemonstrated and undemonstrable things; and we inherit their beliefs. Every year new beliefs appeal to us for acceptance, some of them clashing with the old. Everybody holds numerous beliefs on subjects outside the realm of knowledge; and, moreover, everybody has to act on these beliefs from hour to hour. All men

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of science walk by faith and not by sight in exploring and experimenting, the peculiarity of their walk being that they generally take but one step at a time, and that a short one. All business proceeds on beliefs, or judgments of probabilities, and not on certainties. The very essence of heroism is that it takes adverse chances; so that full foreknowledge of the issue would subtract from the heroic quality. Beliefs, then, we must have and must act on; and they are sure to affect profoundly our happiness in this world. How to treat our old beliefs and choose our new ones, with a view to happiness, is in these days a serious problem for every reflective person.

The first steps toward making a calm choice are to observe strictly the line of demarcation between facts on the one hand and beliefs on the other, and to hold facts as facts and beliefs as nothing more than beliefs. Next we need a criterion or touchstone for beliefs old and new. The surest touchstone is the ethical standard which through inheritance, education, and the experience of daily life has, as a matter of fact, become our standard. It is not for our happiness to believe any proposition about the nature of man, the universe, or God, which is really at war with our fundamental instincts

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of honor and justice, or with our ideals of gentleness and love, no matter how those instincts and ideals have been implanted or arrived at. The man or woman who hopes to attain reflective happiness, as he works his strenuous way through the world, must bring all beliefs, old and new, to this critical test, and must reject, or refuse to entertain, beliefs which do not stand the test.

One obvious fact of observation seems to contradict this correlation of beliefs with ethical content and, therefore, with happiness. Millions of comfortable men and women do, as a matter of fact, believe various long-transmitted doctrines which are clearly repulsive to the moral sense of the entire present generation. How can this be? Simply because these millions accept also antidotal doctrines which neutralize the natural effect of the first beliefs. This process may persist for generations without affecting much the happiness of mankind, but nevertheless it has its dangers; for if faith in the antidotes be lost first, a moral chaos may set in.

Sudden and solitary changes of belief are seldom happy. A gentle, gradual transformation of beliefs, in company with kindred, neighbors and friends, is the happiest. Men have always

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been gregarious in beliefs; if they cannot remain with their own herd, it will be for their happiness to join a more congenial herd as quickly as possible.

Of the two would-be despots in beliefs — the despot who authoritatively commands men to believe as he says, and the despot who forbids men to believe at all — the first is the more tolerable to the immense majority of mankind. Under the first despot millions of people have lived, and now live, in contented faith; but nobody can live happily under the other. To curious, truth-seeking, pioneering minds one seems as bad as the other, and neither in any way endurable.

A certain deliberation in accepting new beliefs is conducive to happiness, particularly if the new ideas are destructive rather than constructive. Emerson recommends us, as a measure of intellectual economy, not to read a book until it is at least one year old — so many books disappear in a year. In like manner, of novel speculative opinions all but the best built and most buoyant will go under within ten years of their launching.

We may be sure that cheerful beliefs about the unseen world, framed in full harmony with the beauty of the visible universe and with the

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sweetness of the domestic affections and joys, and held in company with kindred and friends, will illuminate the dark places on the pathway of earthly life, and brighten all the road.

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The Conflict with Evil



AVING thus surveyed the various joys and satisfactions which may make civilized life happy for multitudes upon multitudes of our race, I hasten to admit that there are physical and moral evils in this world which impair or interrupt earthly happiness. The worst of the physical evils are lingering diseases and untimely deaths. I admit, too, that not a few men do, as a matter of fact, lead lives not worth living. I admit, also, that there are dreadful, as well as pleasing, sights and sounds in this world, and that many seemingly cruel catastrophes and destructions mark the course of nature. Biological science has lately impressed many people with the prevalence of cruelty and mutual destruction in the animal and vegetable world. From man down, the creatures live by preying on each other. Insidious parasites infest all kinds of plants and animals. Every living thing seems to have its mortal foe. The very ants go to war, for all the world like men, and Venus's

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flytrap (Dionæa) is as cruel as a spider. So human society is riddled with mischiefs and wrongs, some, like Armenian massacres, due to surviving savagery, and some, like slums, to sickly civilization. It would seem impossible to wring satisfaction and thoughtful happiness from such evils; yet that is just what men of noble natures are constantly doing. They fight evil, and from the contest win content and even joy. Nobody has any right to find life uninteresting or unrewarding who sees within the sphere of his own activity a wrong he can help to remedy, or within himself an evil he can hope to overcome. It should be observed that the inanimate creation does not lend itself, like the animate creation, to the theory that for every good in nature there is an equivalent evil, and for every beautiful thing an ugly offset. There is no offset to the splendor of the heavens by night or to the glories of the sunset, no drawback on the beauty of perfect form and various hue in crystalline minerals, and no evil counterbalancing the serenity of the mountains or the sublimity of the ocean.

Again, the existence of evils and mysteries must not blind us to the abounding and intelligible good. We must remember that the misfortunes hardest to bear are those which never

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come, as Lowell said. We must clear our minds, so far as possible, of cruel imaginings about the invisible world and its rulers; and, on the other hand, we must never allow imagined consolations, or compensatory delights, in some other world to reconcile us to the endurance of resistible evils in this. We must never distress ourselves because we cannot fully understand the moral principles on which the universe is conducted. It would be vastly more reasonable in an ant to expect to understand the constitution of the sun.

We must be sure to give due weight in our minds to the good side of every event which has two sides. A fierce northeaster drives some vessels out of their course and others upon the ruthless rocks. Property and life are lost. But that same storm watered the crops upon ten thousand farms, or filled the springs which later will yield to millions of men and animals their necessary drink. A tiger springs upon an antelope, picks out the daintiest bits from the carcass, and leaves the rest to the jackals. We say, Poor little antelope! We forget to say, Happy tiger! Fortunate jackals! who were seeking their meat from God, and found it. A house which stands in open ground must have a sunny side as well as a shady. Be sure to live

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on the sunny side, and even then do not expect the world to look bright, if you habitually wear gray-brown glasses.

We must assiduously cultivate a just sense of the proportion between right and wrong, good and evil, in this world. The modern newspaper press is a serious obstacle to habitual cheerfulness, because it draws constant attention to abnormal evils and crimes, and makes no account of the normal successes, joys, and well-doings. We read in the morning paper that five houses, two barns, three shops, and a factory have burned up in the night; and we do not say to ourselves that within the same territory five hundred thousand houses, three hundred thousand barns, as many shops, and a thousand factories have stood in safety. We observe that ten persons have been injured on railways within twenty-four hours, and we forget that two million have travelled in safety. Out of every thousand persons in the city of Cambridge twenty die in the course of a year, but the other nine hundred and eighty live; and of the twenty who die some have filled out the natural span of life, and others are obviously unfit to live. Sometimes our individual lives seem to be full of troubles and miseries — our own or those of others. Then we must fall back

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on this abiding sense of the real proportion between the lives sorrowful and the lives glad at any one moment; and of the preponderance of gain over loss, health over sickness, joy over sorrow, good over evil, and life over death.

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IV
Conclusion

I SHALL not have succeeded in treating my subject clearly if I have not convinced you that earthly happiness is not dependent on the amount of one's possessions or the nature of one's employment. The enjoyments and satisfactions I have described are accessible to poor and rich, to humble and high alike, if only they cultivate the physical, mental, and moral faculties through which the natural joys are won. Any man may win them who by his daily labor can earn a wholesome living for himself and his family. I have not mentioned a single pleasure which involves unusual expense, or the possession of any uncommon mental gifts. It follows that the happiness of the entire community is to be most surely promoted, not by increasing its total wealth, or even by distributing that wealth more evenly, but by improving its physical and moral health. A poorer population may easily be happier than a richer, if it be of sounder health and morality.

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In conclusion, let me ask you to consider whether the rational conduct of life on the this-world principles here laid down would differ in any important respect from the right conduct of life on the principles of the Christian gospels. It does not seem to me that it would.

The End

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